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Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Letter dated 17 August 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the texts of letters from the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Aleksandr Lukashenko, to the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner (see annex I), and to the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers of the European Union and High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the Union, Mr. Javier Solana (see annex II).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 39.

(*Signed*) Alyaksandr **Sychov**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative

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Annex I to the letter dated 17 August 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Minsk, 11 August 2000

It was with interest that I read your letter of 1 August 2000, in which you refer to the parliamentary elections to be held in Belarus in October 2000.

I sincerely appreciate the attention that you and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are giving to the democratic development of Belarus and the establishment of democratic institutions in our country. I have always welcomed and encouraged the qualified aid and real assistance from our Western partners, who have greater experience of democracy than we do. We have carefully studied all the recommendations and proposals that you and representatives of other prestigious international organizations have transmitted to us over the past year through the head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus, Mr. Hans-Georg Wieck.

I assure you that, as head of State, I have done and am doing everything to ensure that the forthcoming parliamentary elections are open, free and democratic. In doing so, I am guided by the long-term interests of our country and not by considerations of the moment.

I hope that the attitude towards these efforts will not be biased, that evaluations will be based on facts and not on stereotypes about Belarus. Unfortunately, some stereotypes have become entrenched and are misleading public opinion in Europe.

I should like to share with you my approach to the solution of the questions that you have raised.

I agree that consolidation and confidence in society are particularly important. That consideration prompted me, as President of Belarus, to initiate, in accordance with paragraph 22 of the Istanbul Summit Declaration of OSCE, a dialogue of social and political forces, which is open to all political parties and non-governmental organizations for the discussion of issues of importance to society, including the notorious question of "constitutional differences".

As you perhaps are aware, support for the radical opposition in Belarus is negligible. According to the latest data, the radical opposition's so-called independent leaders have a rating of about five per cent. Nevertheless, representatives of the radical opposition have been repeatedly invited to take part in the dialogue. We should like to listen to and give full consideration to the opinion of the minority. At the same time, the minority should bear in mind the will of the overwhelming majority of the population. The reason why a small group of leaders of the radical opposition is refusing to take part in the elections is that they are afraid to lose. Such a position is clearly not in keeping with the interests of the further development of civil society in Belarus. I am convinced that the elections should not be held hostage to the political bankruptcy of certain individuals.

I believe that a real dialogue between the Government and the opposition, the need for which you refer to in your letter, must now be held within the context of the electoral campaign already in progress. Those who are sincerely interested in

discussing issues of importance to Belarusian society, those who truly wish to build democracy and do not merely pay lip service to that idea should take part in the elections. How else, if not through representative democracy, can the progress of social institutions be ensured? It is not the Government but the people who must submit its programmes, and voters themselves should freely decide whom they wish to support.

I also wish to emphasize that the socio-political dialogue in Belarus has a right to develop and exist even beyond the forthcoming parliamentary elections, since the social development of our country is an ongoing process.

The new Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus is a solid democratic instrument. It takes account of many suggestions made by OSCE, the European Union, the Council of Europe and representatives of various political groups. This made it more democratic in comparison with the law on the basis of which the thirteenth convocation of the Supreme Council, which is recognized in the West, was elected. I should like to point out that even the original draft electoral code was positively received by the Venetian Commission of the Council of Europe as a suitable basis for holding open and democratic elections. The Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation also commended the final version of the Code. Against this background, the politically motivated and biased opinions of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of OSCE present a striking contrast.

I did not even hesitate to make amendments, through a presidential initiative, to the newly approved Electoral Code. The impetus for this was given by the socio-political dialogue. The new provisions ensure the transparency of the electoral process and its complete openness to monitoring by both international and domestic observers.

I share your view that not only legislative provisions but also other elements that form a common electoral environment will be of great importance to the holding of truly democratic parliamentary elections.

I believe that, on the whole, Belarus possesses the necessary conditions to hold democratic elections in accordance with the Copenhagen Document of OSCE. Nevertheless, I wish to inform you that Belarus is prepared to take additional important steps in the areas that you singled out in your letter.

The Central Electoral Commission will include representatives of the political parties that nominated candidates in the parliamentary elections; those representatives shall have a deliberative voice. The requirements for the participation of political parties and social organizations in electoral commissions at all other levels have already been incorporated into electoral legislation. On the basis of such legislation, about 30 per cent of the representatives of political parties were included in the district commissions.

Our new electoral law directly guaranteed all candidates and all political parties absolutely equal access to the State media during the electoral campaign. All registered candidates irrespective of their political orientation will receive, on an equal basis, free air time on State television to present their political platforms. I hope you have been informed that in Belarus leaders of the opposition have been appearing regularly in State broadcasts, including live broadcasts, for many months.

Incidentally, in our country only about one quarter of the media is owned by the State, and non-State-controlled television and radio companies are in operation.

The leaders of Belarus declared the estal lishment of a period of confidence during the preparations for and the holding o. the elections, and pledged, not to aggravate conditions for the activities of social organizations, political parties and groups, including opposition parties and groups, free trade unions and independent media. I personally guarantee compliance with this commitment. However, we have the right to expect similar measures from the radical opposition.

Out of considerations of goodwill, the State will guarantee to all those who wish to take part in the forthcoming elections the legal possibility of doing so.

The broadening of the functions of parliament is an integral part of the social processes taking place in Belarus. This will be one matter for consideration by the new Parliament.

I take this opportunity to make the official request that you send observers from OSCE and its member States to the parliamentary elections in Belarus, which will be held in October. International and social observers will be guaranteed an opportunity to be present at all stages of the electoral process, and they will be able to oversee the work of the Central Electoral Commission.

I hope that OSCE, considering its interest in the democratic development of Belarus, will participate fully in observing the elections. If it does not, it will miss an opportunity to have a direct source of reliable information, which may call into question the objectivity of its future evaluations.

I believe that a united Europe values Belarus's direct contribution to the strengthening of security on the continent. That contribution is particularly important at a time when Europe continues to be racked by crises.

To be sure, Belarus cannot exist outside Europe. But Europe without Belarus cannot be one and indivisible.

(*Signed*) Aleksandr **Lukashenko**

Annex II to the letter dated 17 August 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am convinced that our direct exchange of views, both by telephone and correspondence, is an important means of normalizing relations between Belarus and the European Union. Such communication enables us to understand each other better and to clear up misunderstandings.

Many of the obstacles in our relations are artificial or exaggerated. However, the lack of personal contact called for by the well-known decisions of the European Union makes it difficult to overcome existing differences and engage in cooperation. That is why I particularly value your initiative to establish such contact.

Normalization of relations with the European Union is one of Belarus's priorities. At the same time, the principal motivation for us is the economic and democratic development of our State and society.

I assure you that, as head of State, I have done and am doing everything to ensure that the forthcoming parliamentary elections are open, free and democratic. In doing so, I am guided by the long-term interests of our country and not by considerations of the moment.

I hope that the attitude towards these efforts will not be biased, that evaluations will be based on facts and not on stereotypes about Belarus. Unfortunately, some stereotypes have become entrenched and are misleading public opinion in Europe.

I should like to share with you my approach to the solution of the questions that you have raised.

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I believe that a united Europe values Belarus's direct contribution to the strengthening of security on the continent. That contribution is particularly important at a time when Europe continues to be racked by crises.

To be sure, Belarus cannot exist outside Europe. But Europe without Belarus cannot be one and indivisible.

I am prepared to continue our dialogue at a time and in a form that is convenient for you.

(*Signed*) Aleksandr **Lukashenko**